

BI@Home: News from your home away from home

A Word from Rabbi Fellman



A woman had two water cans which were attached to a yoke. Each day she put the yoke over her shoulders and went down to the river, filled the cans, and walked back to her home. The water can on the right side of the yoke was fine and sturdy; when she arrived home it was always full. But the can on the left had a crack in it. By the time the woman arrived home, half the water was usually gone.

The left water can always felt inferior to its partner. It was ashamed of its crack. Because it was always half empty by the time it got to the woman's home, it felt that it wasn't pulling its weight. One day it turned to the woman and apologized for being defective. The woman smiled gently and said, "Did you think I didn't know that you had a crack, and water dripped from you? Look at the path from the river to my hut. Do you see all the beautiful flowers that are growing on the one side of the path? Those are the flowers that I planted there, that you watered every day as I walked home from the river. What's amazing is that precisely the thing that you thought made you broken was the exact same thing which made you so powerful. What you thought was your greatest flaw, was exactly what I needed to make our world a more beautiful place. The crack which you thought made you nothing was exactly what was needed to make our world holy. What you think of as your weakness can sometimes be your strength. See yourself as half-full not empty. Turn those flaws into blessings, and this year change your world."

Many of us are feeling a little broken this year. Our routines, our community activities, our spiritual lives, our families, our work, our schooling – all seem to have cracks in them.

It takes so much more effort to connect than it used to. Our community gatherings are mostly virtual and, for many of us, that can feel holey – full of holes. Yet, like the watering can with the crack, we are able to provide nurturance even in this difficult time if only we can see our true potential.

Given the reality that we find ourselves in right now, sometimes all we see are the holes in our buckets. The holes that keep us from feeling refreshed, patient, supported, supporting. Yet we have the incredible ability to plant flowers for ourselves and others.

As the late Leonard Cohen wrote, in Anthem:

*Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.*

Today is a new day. In our sometimes broken Tefillah, we recite Or Chadash Al Tzion Tair V'neskeh Chulanu M'Heira L'oro- Or Chadash... Let a new light shine on Zion that soon we may be worthy of its inheritance.

This is a new year and we have started a new reading of the Torah. We have a chance to let that light in and create our own Torah anew. May the light that is let in through these cracks, and the flowers that we have planted that are nourished by those cracks, and by the light, create beauty in our world and lives. Today is a new day. Tomorrow is, too. May we find the light each day to brighten and enlighten our strength and gifts for ourselves, others, and our communities.

New Beginnings ***Paula Sommer, Beth Israel President***

November is a month for restarts, starting with the beginning of standard time – yay, we get an extra hour of sleep! and choices. I just learned that Israel and Europe changed their clocks back this past weekend, a week earlier than we are doing it in the US. As a child, I remember it always happening before Halloween, so it would be dark for trick-or-treating. When did that change?



Well, in some things, we have choices. We have had two weeks of early voting, and next week is Election Day. I would like to give a shout out to everyone who has participated in our voter registration initiative, and to Evelyn Herwitz Harris, Dale Rosenberg, and Naomi Shertzer, for helping us all express our commitment to democracy. If you are formally helping our choices on Election Day by acting as poll workers or observers, please let us know, so we can celebrate your involvement.

Closer to home, with the holidays behind us, we would like to use this time to focus on our own Beth Israel family, strengthening our community in multiple ways. What opportunities can we offer to gather together, in person or virtually, to keep us connected? For example, on the last weekend of October, we had three in-person events. First, a shabbat afternoon foliage stroll around Worcester's historic Elm Park with Evelyn Herwitz Harris, learning about trees, identifying leaves, and finding the last elm tree in the area. Then there was a Shabbat mincha, ma'ariv, and havdalah service in our sanctuary for those who could attend, livestreamed for all. This was followed on Sunday by a Brotherhood Members Together brunchtime review of Jews and comic books, highlighting the depth of Jewish involvement, and our ongoing influence, presented by Adrian Zeffert. Shabbat services and Sunday morning's event had been planned for a while; the walk came together quickly, based on a random comment that the leaves were so beautiful. We seized the moment to get outside in nice weather.

Now, BI family, we need your input for social events and staying connected. What would you like to see us offer? Please give us your ideas, and we will try to make them happen. As we looked at an acorn under the large oak tree, we are reminded that even small wishes may be combined and expanded into something much larger.

Please contact me, Pat Bizzell (Education), Dale Rosenberg (Programming), Howard Fixler (Membership), or the office. We look forward to hearing from you.

ISAAC SHERTZER BAR MITZVAH



Speaking of New Beginnings – get ready for the first Congregation Beth Israel bar mitzvah of 5781! We join in the joy of the Shertzer/Martin family as Isaac is called to the Torah as a bar mitzvah on November 7. The Shertzer/Martin family will gather in our sanctuary in a socially distanced fashion and Isaac will lead prayers, read from one of our Torah scrolls, and teach us all with his dvar torah. Services begin at 9:30 and will be livestreamed so all can be part of this simcha.

On Friday, November 6, we will have a pre-Shabbat Oneg via Zoom at 3:30 p.m. to celebrate Isaac and his family. Watch your weekly email to get the Zoom link or email office@bethisraelworc.org.

MEMBERS TOGETHER IN NOVEMBER

Twice a month on Sunday mornings we gather for a presentation, breakfast, and a chance to hang out with other BI members and their friends, all safely accomplished via Zoom. Here are the upcoming Members Together Programs for this month:

November 8: USY at BI – It Isn't Just Pie!

Each year our USY chapter bakes and sells Thanksgiving pies as a fundraiser. With health concerns about a bunch of people cooking together at BI during a pandemic, they've planned something a little different for this Thanksgiving. They will sell bake-your-own-pie kits, including what you need to bake a pie at home.



In connection with that project, members of the USY will present on how to bake a pie at the November 8 Members Together, answer questions, and tell us a little more about what USY has planned and has been doing this year. Members Together programs usually start at 9:00 with a social half-hour and a presentation at 9:30. Since the

Federation has a program at 9:00 on 11/8 (Breakfast with Yoav) we're moving this session to 10:00. You can join the Federation program or sleep in!

November 22: Five Things Happening in the Jewish World

Join Jewish Federation of Central Massachusetts Executive Director Steven Schimmel for an enlightening talk on the Jewish community in 2020. It's a remarkable time for Jews worldwide and Steve will help us put it all in perspective.

Bring your breakfast at 9:00 and schmooze a little or just catch Steve's talk at 9:30. You'll be glad you did!



PROJECT ZUG

Our second group class with Project Zug is considering Everyday Moral Dilemmas. The course began in October and is finishing on November 11. For four successive weeks participants grapple with common ethical concerns such as when is it okay to lie, and what constitutes theft. We look to Jewish texts – old and new – for some approaches to the question. As a group we do an introduction, some brief text study, and then divide into pairs to read and discuss texts. We reconvene to debrief at the end. Discussions are lively. Participants don't always agree with the advice in the texts we read, but I think they'd all say they learn from them.



We will launch a new group class in January. Watch this space and your email to see which class it will be and to sign up.

You don't have to wait until January to learn with Project Zug! Due to a generous donation from Barry Aframe, all Beth Israel members have unlimited access to Project Zug classes without charge. You can take group classes with BI or individual classes with a partner, or some of each. Join us on November 18 at 7:30 p.m. if you'd like to learn more about how to register for classes and use the Project Zug website.

We'll show you the different features of the website, explain the enrollment process, and answer questions you might have about how to access the various resources available at Project Zug. The link for this meeting will be in an upcoming email. If you have questions about Project Zug before the November 18 presentation, email Dale.Rosenberg@bethisraelworc.org or call 917 292-4552.

NEWS FROM THE SHARING/CARING NETWORK ***MICHELLE COCHRAN***

Shelter Meals During a Pandemic

We have a new Tikkun Olam Project. Since we have not been able to do our usual shelter meals as in the past, we thought we might try something different. Instead of us getting together to cook, we will all make something in our own kitchens and bring it to a central drop off spot and it then will be brought to a shelter. We will be cooking for about 10-20 people: a main dish (doesn't have to be kosher), fruit, dessert and a salad. We're planning on doing meals twice a month. To participate, you only need to commit to once a month. Let me know if you would be interested in cooking for this important effort or if you have any questions: 508-347-7333 or weefishe@charter.net

Crafts Thursday

We're trying something new! We'll have a weekly Zoom meeting on Thursdays in November and December, where we'll do crafts for a cause. Meeting together, we will crochet and knit blankets for Habitat for Humanity clients, or to do other crafts of a Tikkun Olam nature.

It's a chance to have fun, socialize, and do something for others – all at the same time. Each Thursday at 1:00 we'll spend an hour together crafting and chatting. We start on November 5 and will be meeting every Thursday in November, except for Thanksgiving Day. We'll continue these sessions in December and perhaps beyond.



TGIF RETURNS!

Many of us have been waiting with bated breath for the return of Rabbi Fellman's weekly program "Torah Goodness It's Friday" also known as TGIF. Starting on the first Friday in November, we will resume meeting at 10:00 a.m. on Friday via Zoom. Under the rabbi's able guidance we will discuss the parasha of the week. Join us November 6, when the topic is Parasha Vayera. It's a key section of the story of our patriarchs, including the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the birth of Isaac, and the Akedah. Torah study in general and TGIF in particular can help you get into the Shabbat mood!

RIMON 5781 UPDATE

Dale Rosenberg, Director of Education/Programming



Rimon students continue to meet on Mondays and Wednesdays via Zoom. We've been exploring midrash, playing games about Hebrew words for different colors, learning tefilah, and exploring Jewish heroes old and new. Every Thursday, the Rimon families get curated links and activities on a theme, which they can explore over the weekend. Individual Hebrew tutorials are also offered to all Rimon students.

In October we had our Rimon Sukkot Celebration, with Sukkot crafts and stories, Zoomed from my sukkah! Simchat Torah had a special Rimon neighborhood walk with family-oriented questions about each book of the Torah. This month we are exploring sacred text as we begin the Torah reading cycle anew. We have more special events planned throughout the year, including a Hanukkah party via Zoom. We look forward to meeting in person again when it's safe to do so. If you'd like to learn more about Rimon, contact me at rimon@bethisraelworc.org.

JOIN THE FEDERATION FOR BREAKFAST WITH YOAV ON 11/8 AND TORATHON ON 11/14

BREAKFAST WITH YOAV



The Jewish Federation of Central Massachusetts in general, and our own Liz Baker in particular, maintain relationships with our former Shinshinim (emissaries), even during a pandemic!

On Sunday, November 14 we have an opportunity to hear from a former Young Emissary: Yoav Luxembourg (2016-2017). Bring your coffee and bagel and Zoom in to this virtual breakfast at 9:00 a.m. Yoav will talk about his work in the IDF's Elite Combat Unit.

RSVP to Mindy Hall at mhall@jfcmm.org or Liz Baker at lizkbaker58@gmail.com to get the Zoom link.

TORATHON

Every year, the Jewish Federation of Central Massachusetts sponsors Torathon – a night of Jewish learning. Due to the pandemic, this year's Torathon will be held online.

Torathon 2020: An Evening Of Online Learning In Our Community

This year's theme is: Great Events/Personalities/Ideas that have shaped Judaism.



On Saturday night, November 14th, from the comfort of your own home, join us as local rabbis and educators come together to lead us in an evening of growth, learning and inspiration. Torathon will begin with Havdalah, starting at 6:30, followed by 18 course offerings of adult Jewish study divided into 3 hours during the rest of the evening.

To view the entire evening's program, (available October 30), for more information, and to make a donation, go to www.jewishcentralmass.org/torathon, or call 508-756-1543. Torathon is generously funded by a grant from the Jewish Federation of Central Massachusetts and the Rotman Family Foundation. Registration is required to attend.

RACIAL JUSTICE INITIATIVE

Alan Harris and BI President Paula Sommer are co-sponsoring an important new, year-long initiative to educate ourselves and improve our commitment to increasing Racial Justice. Protests after the death of George Floyd placed a spotlight on systemic racism. The issue of its consequences is being confronted by Jewish communities throughout the United States.

The goal of the Racial Justice Initiative Task Force is to develop a multi-faceted approach to enhancing our members' knowledge of and response to systemic racism. It will include written material (short essays, stories or poetry to be read and discussed), presentations/events (speakers, video), and spiritual opportunities (through prayer and music) to raise our consciousness of this vitally important issue. We envision this effort to begin soon and to plan programming for at least a year.

Please contact Alan Harris (alwharris@aol.com or 508-757-5305) if you are interested in joining the BI Task Force on Racial Justice.

MEDITATION IS BACK!

Pat Bizzell, VP for Education

I'm delighted to announce that Elena Salmoirago-Blotcher will resume weekly meditation classes on Thursday 3 December, from 6-6:45 p.m. I participated in her spring meditation sessions and they felt essential to my mental health! Not surprising, since Elena is studying the effects of behavioral changes on preventing or mitigating cardiovascular disease. A cardiologist who practiced in her native Italy and in Israel, Elena now serves as Senior Research Scientist at the Centers for Behavioral and Preventive Medicine at the Miriam Hospital. The distinctions on her c.v. are too numerous to list! In addition, Elena has trained in mindfulness stress reduction since 2003. She is a wonderful group leader, so don't miss this opportunity to add some peace and clarity to your world. A zoom link will be sent out as we get closer to the first class.

THE 100 WORDS PROJECT – WHERE IN THE WORLD DID YOU GROW UP JEWISH?

A recent Sunday morning program featured a panel of BI members who grew up in places with small Jewish communities talking about their experiences. As a follow-up, we've asked a few people to see if they can summarize their own Jewish upbringing, but do so in 100 words. Here are our first two responses:

Where is the world did I grow up Jewish? By Pat Bizzell

I didn't! My parents were Presbyterians. They grew up in Midwestern farm country and didn't know any Jews. But they raised me in a Chicago suburb, where I had Jewish friends, went to my senior prom with a Jew, and later on, married a Jew. I didn't convert when we married, however. That came later, when we wanted some religion at home for our children. I was attracted to Judaism, studied it, and decided to convert in 1982, two years before our daughters arrived from Korea. Thirty years and one divorce later, I found another great Jewish guy to marry!

Where is the world did I grow up Jewish? By Herb Daroff

All of my formal education was in Philadelphia, from Kindergarten through Law School. As a senior in high school, I won a speech contest for Pennsylvania and competed in the nationals. As we introduced ourselves, the first question was, "What's your religion?" I was the only Jew and the only Jew that many of the other State champions had ever met. I was glad that I knew how to answer their questions. When I taught Sunday School, I made sure that my students would be as prepared to answer such questions.

Would you like to share your Jewish journey in 100 words? It's harder than you might think. If you try it and you're willing to share, send your 100 word Jewish autobiography to Dale.Rosenberg@bethisraelworc.org and you just might see it in a future issue of BI@Home

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